

Greenmount – February 2010

The gremlins plaguing our house have now spread to the garage. More on this later.

On 1st February, my desk top computer loaded up, seemingly quite normally and I was even thinking of putting the side cover back on. That was mistake number three.

Mistakes numbers one and two were waking up and getting out of bed.

The computer refused to communicate with anything and, in particular, the Internet. On closer examination, I discovered that an important part of Microsoft Windows (the TCP/IP stack) had not loaded. I used Matthew's server to interrogate the Internet for a solution to the problem and it seems that Microsoft has so cleverly designed Windows XP that the missing component cannot be loaded manually separately. It requires a reinstallation of Windows. There are some suggestions on how to fix the problem but they didn't work for me. No surprise there.

I shall not bore you with technical details. Suffice it to say that the complicated disc arrangement of my desk top computer rendered the full day I spent on trying to reload Windows a total disaster and the position I reached was that I needed a clean disc on which to load a copy of the operating system. Since I did not have one, I had to scrounge one off Matthew.

On the 3rd, I decided to try to resurrect Jenny's old lap top and I have managed to get it working by loading Windows in a special way. For the technical people, if you press the F8 key just before Windows starts to load, it presents you with some special options for starting Windows. In my case, since the graphics card is suffering from rigor mortis (that's a special feature, producing a blank screen), I loaded Windows in VGA mode. This seemed to work reasonably well for most basic tasks but it does have severe limitations. Still, I have loaded all my desk top documents onto the lap top for the present and I can now keep track of how much money I owe the bank.

It started to snow quite heavily again in the late afternoon and when Jenny came back from her crossing patrol, I decided to put our car in the garage so I could then place Rachel's car on the drive, under cover, when she came home. On leaving the garage, I pressed the key fob to close the automatic roller door and nothing happened. Investigation revealed no obvious fault and I had to resort to closing the door manually. This requires a key, which, miraculously, we found almost immediately, a long handle with two universal joints and a considerable amount of effort.

I telephoned Anglian Home Improvements, the company which supplied and fitted the door five or six years ago. After being given several wrong telephone numbers and finding the right one on the Internet and then being cut off at least once, I finally spoke to a very helpful chap who told me the door was out of warranty and that I needed to contact their supplier. He very kindly gave me their telephone number and rang off. What excellent after-sales service.

Even better, the number proved to be wrong. From the company name, I managed to find

the right number on the Internet and spoke to a very helpful lady. She arranged for someone to telephone me back. I spoke to a very nice chap who diagnosed the problem for me after I told him the sequence of flashing lights on the control box. The good news was that he knew what the fault was. Either the LED transmitter or the PCB was faulty. The bad news was that the company no longer makes that model of door and they have no spares. The solution to the problem seemed to be an “upgrade”, with a new control box and sensors. The man, called Gary, said he would call me back the following day after thinking about the “lowest cost option” for “upgrading” my system.

With my current run of luck, I thought I'd better contact Sony to find out when my new laptop computer was being shipped. It seemed they have been waiting for a delivery of the carrying cases and a consignment was due in “tomorrow”. Stock would be allocated to me “tomorrow” and my order would be shipped out the day after. The tone used by the lady to whom I spoke was a bit like that used when one says “The cheque is in the post”. I resolved to check that my goods were on their way to me two days hence.

I was thinking of participating in the National Lottery again, since I could do with some money, but I don't think we'll bother. If we won the jackpot, we'd probably lose the ticket.

On 4th February I had yet another brainwave. That's the second this year. I decided to try fixing the garage door by powering it off and on again. Success. It's just as well, because Gary didn't bother to telephone me back as promised.

I thought I'd chance my luck and have another look at Jenny's lap top. I manually removed all of the driver files for the graphics card except one which the system said was in use, removed the graphics card from the hardware configuration and reloaded. The system found and automatically installed the graphics card again, although from where it acquired the drivers I have no idea. I then tried enhancing the graphics mode in stages until it was on the highest setting. Success again.

Being on something of a roll, I looked round for something else to fix.

On Friday 5th February, I collected a brand new hard disc from Matthew and commenced rebuilding my desk top computer system from scratch the following day. Some 150 steps and five days later, I had my desk top system back to its normal operational state, with all of the discs and software installed and Matthew's disc ready for return.

On Tuesday 9th February, Sony still had not shipped out the new laptop I had ordered and, having fixed Jenny's lap top and being well on the way to having a working desk top again, I decided to telephone and cancel the order. The gentleman on the telephone from Sony was not best pleased and said it would be shipped the following day. I had to point out twice that the lady I spoke to the previous week had lied to me when she told me it would be shipped on the Friday and I was not doing business with a company that tells lies. Now you know why I never entered politics. He said he would refund my money. So how come Sony bills me for goods they haven't shipped?

My credit card statement arrived on 19th February and, sure enough, there was no sign of a credit from Sony. I telephoned the Sony Centre and was told the credit had to come from

the shop in Bolton and the gentleman with whom I spoke would contact them by E-mail. He also said he would contact me again on the 22nd. Not wishing to leave anything to chance, I contacted the shop in Bolton directly and was assured that the manager would deal with the refund as a matter of urgency.

To my surprise, my contact at the Sony Centre, David Orme, did telephone me on the 22nd as promised, apologised for the refund not having been processed, admitted that the service I had received from Sony on this occasion was not good enough and promptly arranged the refund while I was on the telephone. He's obviously too good to be working for Sony and I am very grateful to him and that he is.

As one problem is resolved, another rears its ugly head, or, in this case, resurrects itself. Jenny's laptop screen is displaying everything in monochrome – black. I have managed to make it work by removing the graphics card drivers again and using a Microsoft generic video driver but this does not provide all of the screen functionality of the ATI drivers I should be using. Since the fault is intermittent and it was working again for at least a week after my last attempt to repair it, I have resolved to have a poke around (that's a highly-skilled, technical procedure) inside myself to see if there are any loose connections, etc. It is needless to say that I shall back everything up first.

I have read that, in reassembling the cover on the base of the laptop, if one places the wrong, long screw in a certain hole, the Fujitsu laptop is so well designed that the screw penetrates the graphics card, rendering it useless. Presumably, it was Fujitsu that invented the term describing disaster, "screw-up".

Meanwhile, it is a case of looking for a replacement – again – and Matthew's advice is to steer clear of Sony (I need advice to do that?) and look at HP. I might also look at Dell, since they used to have a good reputation.